

WITT Standards and Guidelines - Building Foundations for Technical Training

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WITT National Network developed, in early 1992, a succinct and useful 4 page legal-size document which clearly describes the national standards for content and program development for courses for women exploring trades, technology and operational occupations. WITT has included not only the measurable tasks, competencies and technical skills necessary for successful entry into these fields, but also the more amorphous integrative skills and personal and professional development that enhance ones ability to engage in critical thinking and troubleshooting activities; that allow one to understand and meet a diversity of internal and external needs in the process.

WITT women and their advocates have been working on these issues for a long time. From the development of the first pre-trades programs in Winnipeg and Saskatoon in the late 70's and early 80's , through the curriculum and relational learning work at Fanshawe college in London used around Ontario and the country in the 1980's, through the formalized curriculum guide and resource book published by the BC Ministry of Advanced Education in 1987....WITT women and advocates have been identifying needs and developing effective programming to assist women to bridge the gaps in our socialization and learn the skills that will enable us to gain challenging, satisfying and economically sustainable employment in technical fields where women have been under-represented.

In 1988, Kootenay WITT and Karyo Communications carried out a survey of the graduates of exploratory courses in trades and technology for women (often called WITT Courses, but known by several other names as well). That study clearly demonstrated the success of this kind of pre-training. At the time of the survey 63% of the graduates were employed and another 13% were in technical training. With 47% working in a trade or technical area and many of the others in operational jobs, even those who chose to enter clerical and managerial work indicated that it was the self-esteem and self-confidence gained especially from learning tool skills, as well as the personal and professional skill development, that enabled them to pursue their current occupational choices.

The survey report, contracted by Employment and Immigration Canada (EIC/HRD) discovered that during 1983-1987, there were a spectrum of programs being delivered,

varying in length (6-32 weeks) and technical content (1-8 weeks of technical shop time) and quality of personal and career development skills provided. The report identified a number of recommendations for EIC/HRD at the national, provincial and local levels, as well as for provincial governments and college administrations.

By 1988, federal government funding policies through CJS, and the lack of provincial and college support for these programs had all but eliminated these training programs in most provinces. Saskatchewan lost all WITT type programming, British Columbia went from 13 to 2 programs, almost every college in Ontario that had previously offered 2-3 WITT programs per year severely cut back on their offerings. New Brunswick never had any at all, and Nova Scotia had them for only a very short time.

At the same time, the Employment Equity Act and the Federal Contractors Program came into effect and pressure was being put on industry to increase their representation of women in trades, technical, operations and blue collar work (TTO/BCW). Employers were saying, "we can't find any women," and EIC/HRD, the department responsible for ensuring the implementation of Employment Equity, was eliminating the programs that provided the basic training for women to enter these fields. A national study of apprenticeship identified the low participation of women in apprenticeship training as a significant issue for our country.

In 1990, the Canadian Labour Market and Productivity Centre (CLMPC) National Task Force on Apprenticeship recommended that these courses be provided in every college in the country, a recommendation that only recently received limited endorsement of the National Apprenticeship Committee of the Canadian Labour Force Development Board (CLFDB). The province of Ontario, through its pilot Women's Access to Apprenticeship projects, found that to achieve success, they must ensure the women had access to WITT exploratory courses to prepare them for the technical work and the variety of working environments which they might encounter.

As the WITT National Network came into force in 1989, an education and advocacy organization dedicated to increase the numbers and enhance the experience of women training and working in TTO/BCW, the delivery of WITT courses was high on our agenda. It was clear from the "previous research and current experiences of members that the ad hoc nature of these courses was not adequately serving the purpose of preparing women to take on training and employment in trades, technology and operations occupations." Course time frames, availability and content were still being defined by available funding at community colleges and Canada Employment Centres rather than by the needs of

industry and the women needing appropriate and transferable training.

In 1992, our national Industrial Adjustment Service (IAS) committee brought together a groups of "experts" in the field: a Dean of Trades, technicians, tradeswomen, technology educators, WITT instructors, Industrial Training Consultants, equity consultants to industry, representatives from the Canadian Automotive Repair and Service Council (CARS), and the Canadian Construction Association (CCA). Southern Alberta Institute of Technology sponsored a two-day session in a modified DACUM process (a uniquely Canadian process for determining an occupational analysis for a particular occupation prior to further curriculum development) out of which came our National Standards and Program Development Guidelines for WITT Exploratory Courses and Trade/Technology Specific Courses for Women, a four page legal-size synthesis covering program goals and objectives, methodology, expected outcomes, industrial/technological sectors to be explored, time frames, and course content. The unanimity of this diverse group was surprising.

The course content chart includes major sections on Professional Development, Occupational Health and Fitness, Work Related Skills (recognize and use safely tools and materials in a variety of hands-on settings), Handle Work Related Issues, Acquire Technological and Workplace Literacy, Career Exploration and Development, and use Communication Skills. Each category was broken down into a number of task and/or personal skill related areas which would ultimately enable particularly a female student to effectively handle training and working in a TTO/BCW environment.

The next step was to gain profile and acceptance, more funding for programs and implementation of the Standards and Guidelines. They were passed out at the Canadian Council of Directors of Apprenticeship (CCDA) Symposium and at the CLFDB board meeting and at their National Apprenticeship Committee. They were available at the Canadian Vocational Association (CVA) and the National Consultation on Career Development (NATCON) where WITT did workshops highlighting their use. They were mailed to Deputy Ministers and Assistant Deputy Ministers of Advanced Education and Skills Development across the country, and to the Deans of Trades and Technology at all community colleges with a cover letter asking them to tell us how they were using the material. Feedback was good, comments included, "this is a set of entry-level standards for anyone entering trades or technical work," "this course should be given to everyone in secondary school to prepare them for the world of work." "Yes," we said, "but we must ensure that women-only programming continues to be available at the exploratory level for those many women who need a supportive environment in which to try out new skills

and take new risks." WITT reminded them of several difficult situations and changes in classroom dynamics that had arisen as a result of admitting men to what had been women-only training programs. Until the dynamics that have been created as a result of our socialization change and we have instructors committed to dealing effectively with mixed- gender technical classrooms, we must maintain the option of women training with women, particularly at the exploratory level of technical disciplines.

During this period, we noticed the proliferation of short-term programs being offered, particularly by private trainers taking advantage of EIC/HRD funding. There was often end-of-the-fiscal-year money thrown at the issue resulting in 6 or 8 week training programs that in no way met our Standards and Guidelines. It was time to tackle EIC/HRD.

In British Columbia, the Women's Employment and Training Coalition (WETC) co-chairs a committee with the Director of Programs for the BC/Yukon Region of EIC/HRD. This unique gathering, the Women's Employment Advisory Committee (WEAC), provides a vehicle for the analysis of the impact of EIC/HRD policy on those who actually are affected by it. While the group does not engage in individual advocacy work, specific situations often assist in highlighting necessary program or policy changes: an ideal forum in which to introduce the WITT Standards and Program Development Guidelines.

While EIC/HRD often removes itself from responsibility by saying that they do not control curriculum, we pointed out that by controlling the time-frames in which the courses were taught, they were, in fact, controlling the curriculum and the quality of the programming. They acknowledged that perhaps they do have a role to play in moving the Standards and Guidelines forward, and meetings were set up for WITT with the Direct Purchase and Purchase of Training Managers, as well as Project Based Training Consultants. WITT would present the Standards and Guidelines and "elaborate on elements and principles contained in it and issues around its application." As a result, regionally, EIC/HRD made a commitment to fund only those programs which met the standard and to strongly encourage those sponsors to incorporate the Standards and Guidelines into their proposals. But of course, decision making is very decentralized, and those decisions were being made on an individual case basis in the local Canada Employment Centres across the country.

This has resulted in the cancellation of the longest running trades exploratory course in the country (and the only program in Manitoba) at Red River College; the cancellation of the only program in PEI, sponsored by the East Prince Women's Centre through Holland

College and the refusal to fund the only program in Nova Scotia, sponsored by YW-NOW through the Nova Scotia Institute of Technology. The list can go on.

In BC, WITT continued to receive calls both from groups wanting to put on courses and from EIC/HRD personnel wanting to check with us about implementing the guidelines. The local CECs were taking seriously the Local Planning Guidelines which recommended increasing the implementation and delivery of programs which met WITT's National Standards and Program Development Guidelines. We recently received an informal report on the delivery of Project Based Training initiatives related to WITT type courses and the ways in which the standards had guided the process in 8 locations around the province. In every case, they provided an important tool to assist in the effective creation and delivery of much needed and well utilized exploratory trades and technical training for women, even in quite rural areas of the province. Clearly, this potential for success needed to be shared around the country, but the time and money required to go through this process in every province seemed daunting. Over the years, WITT has met with the changing Deputy Minister of EIC/HRD, and put this message out a number of times. Of course, each time the minister changes, you must go back and reiterate, reminding them of past correspondence and discussions. That department reorganizes more frequently than any other, and those with responsibility for the issue change regularly. Tenacity is a much needed virtue for moving that system. While one deputy agrees to put someone onto looking at the BC/Yukon model of implementation, that person soon moves and is given other responsibilities and our case gets lost in the shuffle. Time to go back and ask yet again.

It is also important for WITT's regional reps and advocates to follow up with the Directors of Programs in their regions, sharing the well documented WEAC minutes, which show well how the issues have moved through the system in BC/Yukon. WITT has spoken with a few of these Directors, and there is always some reason why they cannot move ahead.

But, in reality, all the implementation efforts are for naught when "Since 1990....the amount of money that is specifically targeted to training has declined by 48%...from 1990-91 to 1991-92, federal government funding for training was cut by 100 million dollars. Over that same year, training expenditures for women declined by 108 million dollars ...In effect, women took the full brunt of these cuts!!!....The programs that have been most successful in assisting these women -- bridging programs that integrate skill training, upgrading, English Language, counselling and life skills -- have been the that have been most severely cut back."

Women make up the vast majority of those living below the poverty line in Canada. Until the government ensures that women have access to appropriate skills training for ongoing and emerging trades and technology occupations, and equitable access to those jobs, women's opportunities for economic sustainability will continue to be limited. These exploratory courses have clearly proven their worth. Now is the time to make the commitment to ongoing funding for these and other "bridging" programs.

For copies of the National Standards and Program Development Guidelines for WITT Courses and Trade/Technology Specific Courses for Women , contact [Kootenay WITT](#) or the WITT National Network, 10 Douglas Court, Unit 2, London Ontario N5W 4A7, (519) 453-2105 Fc:453-2087). (WITT National Network is now defunct. Their archives rest with SaskWITT

Note: While I have referred to the federal government department responsible for this issue as EIC, Employment and Immigration Canada, recent reorganizations have changed this name to Human Resources Development (HRD).

This originally appeared on the website of Kootenay Women in Trades & Technology>
<http://www.ssane.com/koot-witt/standard.htm>